



DEPARTMENT OF STATE

BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

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To: The Secretary

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Analysis of Arab-Israeli Developments  
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Syrian politicians over the past several weeks have increasingly discussed the impact of Sadat's initiative on the peace process. Almost to the man, according to Embassy Damascus, they admit the positive effect Sadat's initiative has had on American and Western European public opinion. The Arab world's image has improved and Israel has been shown to be a "recalcitrant stumbling block" to peace.

Nevertheless, these Syrians are convinced that the Sadat initiative has been a step backward from real peace. To the Syrians, more so than the other Arabs, the heart of the Middle East conflict remains the Palestinian question. According to the Syrians, neither Syria nor the US or any Middle Eastern state can bring peace to the area unless the Palestinians have a homeland.

Furthermore, the Syrians contend that the US, Israel, and Egypt can arrange a Sinai agreement, but they cannot turn the clock back to before the Rabat Summit. The PLO is a fact of life, in their view.

It is on the Palestinian question where Sadat's initiative has failed. The Syrians argue that Sadat has had no impact on the world perception of the Palestinian question. The Americans, according to these observers, if anything, see the PLO in starker terms than they did before Sadat's initiative. The US, which before the initiative had been seeking ways to bring the PLO into the peace process now seems to have turned its back on the organization.

The Sadat initiative, moreover, has created difficulties for those Palestinians willing to negotiate. The Syrians claim that Sadat's action coupled with the US

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reaction has strengthened the rejectionists who claim that the Palestinian people will be the big losers in a negotiated settlement.

Finally, the Syrians assert that the entire episode has edged further and further away from real peace. Much territory will have to be recrossed to redress this setback. In addition, the Syrians insist that the impact of Sadat's initiative on Israel has been negative. Comparing Israel's positions before and after, they see Israel's stand as hardening:

- Israel accepted before, at least in principle, a unified Arab delegation to Geneva, while now the Israelis only see the hope of splitting Sadat off from the rest of the Arab world to conclude a separate peace.
- Before, Israel was in doubt whether it could get peace and territory. Sadat convinced them they can if they only remain steadfast.

Recent statements by Assad and Khaddam indicate that the Syrians are increasingly willing to reconcile their differences with Sadat if he abandons his initiative. Gone from Syrian rhetoric is the demand that the Egyptian leader admit his error in initiating contacts with the Israelis. For example, Khaddam declared on June 5 that there are now only three conditions for Syrian-Egyptian reconciliation. Sadat should:

- declare he abandons his initiative;
- declare his commitment to abide by joint Arab action;  
and
- closes all doors he has opened with the Israelis.